

Florida Bristle Fern Final Listing: Questions & Answers

Q1: Why is the Florida bristle fern being protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA)?

A1: There are only six small populations of this subspecies—four in Miami-Dade County and two in Sumter County—covering a combined total area of only 155 square feet. Habitat modification and destruction caused by human population growth and development, agricultural conversion, regional drainage and canal installation have impacted the range and abundance of the Florida bristle fern. These threats are not reduced by existing regulatory mechanisms. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service assessed the best available scientific and commercial data regarding the past, present and future threats to the Florida bristle fern and determined this subspecies should be listed under the ESA as endangered.

Q2: Was the public able to comment on this rule before your final decision was made?

A2: There was a 60-day public comment period that ended on December 8, 2014. The Service was particularly interested in comments concerning biology, range, and population trends. At the conclusion of the comment period, the Service reviewed information received from the public and peer reviewers and decided to pursue the original proposal in the form of a final rule. The final decision does not differ significantly from the proposal.

Q3: Are you also considering a critical habitat designation for the fern? And if so, how much land is being looked at and where?

A3: Yes. According to the ESA, critical habitat may be designated to the maximum extent prudent and determinable for any species determined to be an endangered or threatened species. A rule proposing critical habitat is expected in 2016.

Areas proposed as critical habitat may include lands in Miami-Dade and Sumter Counties. However, exactly how much land or the specific units have not been determined at this point. The Service is currently reviewing new information from a recent study completed in Sumter County. When the agency proposes critical habitat, a separate public comment period will be announced.

Q4: Is the Florida bristle fern found in the pine rockland habitat in Miami-Dade County?

A4: No. In Miami-Dade County, the plant is found only in rockland hammocks, which are more humid and have a denser canopy than pine rocklands. However, rockland hammocks may occur within, or be mixed with pine rockland habitat, and pine rockland habitat may transition into rockland hammock if fires do not occur often enough.

Q5. How will private landowners be impacted by this listing action?

Currently, Florida bristle fern is not known to occur on private property. If the fern is discovered on private property, it is our hope that landowners would be good stewards of any Florida bristle ferns on their property. The Service has a program, Partners for Fish and Wildlife, which provides landowners with technical and financial assistance to manage their property.

Federally-listed plants are not protected from damage, collection, movement, or destruction (take) on non-federal lands. If a person wishes to develop private land then the potential destruction, damage, or movement of endangered or threatened plants does *not* violate the ESA, unless the project involves a federal permit or federal funding, or violates state law. These actions are prohibited on federal lands. Finally, the ESA does make it illegal to attempt to engage or engage in interstate or foreign commerce or import or export federally-listed plants or solicit another to do so.